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Viewing cable 08MOSCOW2425, PRESS BIAS SHIFTS IN FAVOR OF MEDVEDEV, BUT PUTIN

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cable's unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08MOSCOW2425**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08MOSCOW2425	2008-08-15 10:49	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Moscow

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.spiegel.de/>

VZCZCXYZ0002
RR RUEHWEB

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 002425

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/15/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: PRESS BIAS SHIFTS IN FAVOR OF MEDVEDEV, BUT PUTIN
STILL IN CONTROL

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Alice G. Wells for reason
1.4(d).

1. Summary: xxxxx reported the results xxxxx in a recent meeting with PolOff. While Medvedev dominated Russian programming on four of five surveyed stations, his appearances were disproportionately ceremonial in contrast to Putin's hands on control of the Russian government. The virtual absence of airtime provided to most opposition parties continued to slow an already weak opposition, and experience and intuition told xxxxx that his study would fall on deaf ears, a prediction already supported by the empty auditorium at his press conference hours before our meeting. Russian Communist Party (KPRF) leader Gennadiy Zuganov publicly and privately praised xxxxx for his research as a boost to KPRF calls for greater press freedom. Medvedev's sagging standing in the polls, despite lavish T.V. coverage, is one indication of his difficulty in coming out from Putin's shadow. End Summary.

Medvedev Main Headliner, but Putin Top Dog

2. (C) On August 4, xxxxx told PolOff that while Medvedev received twice as much press coverage as Putin during the testing period, most of his meetings were largely ceremonial, while Putin's on-air performances continued to give the impression that he held the reins of power. xxxxx unabashedly called Medvedev a "no one" in Russian politics, claiming he was nothing more than a "pen in one's pocket" or

"a glass on the table" as he raised a pen and glass from his desk. Medvedev continued to attract interest with his anti-corruption campaign, but Putin still called the shots that mattered.

13. (C) An August 7 poll from Levada Center indicated only 9% of Russians believe Medvedev controlled Russia's direction, while 36% believed Putin remained in sole power and almost 50% saw a tandem presidency. A related Levada Center poll from July 18-22 showed that 82% of Russians believed, to some degree, that Medvedev merely continued Putin's policies, while only 11% saw Medvedev gradually changing the country's political course. Leading pollsters tended to agree with survey results. xxxxx hinted to PolOff on August 6 that Russians would probably see Medvedev as even less in control after Putin's recent Mechel comments and subsequent stock market scare. xxxxx told PolOff on August 8 that the then-emerging conflict in South Ossetia clearly painted Putin as the country's leader.

Study Results: Winners Won, Losers Lost

14. (SBU) xxxxx detailed the results of his recent research project on propaganda in the press, done in conjunction with Memo 98 Media Monitoring. The project tracked primetime press coverage of major political figures and government departments from June 5-20 on three government-run television stations (Channel One, TV Rossiya, and TV Center) and two privately-owned channels (NTV and REN TV). xxxxx ascribed a positive, neutral, or negative connotation to each news item, then calculated the total amount of time devoted to each person or group.

15. (SBU) The study revealed that all channels, except for REN TV, dedicated a disproportionate amount of airtime to positive or neutral coverage of incumbent politicians and cabinet members, rarely casting them in a negative light. REN TV, however, distributed airtime more evenly to a greater number of political parties and levied negative commentary against the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Vladimir Zhirinovskiy-led Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). Most of REN TV's remaining coverage was neutral and biased. Stations devoted remaining airtime to less important government figures including Duma Speaker and Chairman of the High Council of United Russia Party Boris Gryzlov, First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov, Russian Minister for Emergency Situations Sergei Shoigu, Vice Premier and Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin, Regional Development Minister Dmitriy Kozak, and Economic Development Ministry chief Elvira Naibullina. xxxxx produced the following results:

Channel One (16.9% market share, formerly ORT, state-controlled network): Medvedev (48.9%), Putin (22.9%), United Russia (6.1%), Russian Deputy Premier Sergei Ivanov (3.0%), A Just Russia (1.4%), FSB (1.3%), KPRF (0.3%).

TV Rossiya (15.8% market share, formerly RTR, state-controlled network): Medvedev (50%), Putin (26.8%), Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (2.7%), Ivanov (2.0%), United Russia (1.9%), FSB (0.9%), KPRF (0.9%), LDPR (0.8%), A Just Russia (0.1%).

TV Center (4.2% market share, city of Moscow-owned national network): Medvedev (43.9%), United Russia (17.1%), Putin (16.9%), Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov (15.7%), Lavrov (4.8%), Ivanov (3.0%), A Just Russia (0.2%), FSB (0.1%).

NTV (12.3% market share, Gazprom-owned national network): Medvedev (57.3%), Putin (17.6%), Ivanov (5.7%), United Russia (2.2%), Lavrov (2.0%), KPRF (1.1%), FSB (0.6%).

REN TV (7.1% market share, Rossiya Bank majority ownership, independent network): Medvedev (28.6%), Zhirinovskiy (12.2%), KPRF (12.0%), LDPR (12.0%), Yabloko (11.3%), United Russia (10.4%), Union of Right Forces (SPS) (6.7%), FSB (6.0%), Putin (2.1%), A Just Russia (0.8%).

xxxxx and Communists: an Unexpected Alliance

16. (C) xxxxx showed PolOff a letter from Zuganov that lavished praise on xxxxx his outstanding contribution to political reform in Russia. xxxxx then recalled to PolOff that Zuganov approached him at the Embassy Independence Day celebration at Spaso House, joyously thanked him in front of numerous witnesses, hugged him, and named xxxxx a "friend of the Communist Party." xxxxx retorted to Zuganov saying "I did not do this research for you, I did it for my country's future." xxxxx shuddered as he relayed the story, sheepishly noting that his grandfather and father would turn in their graves had they heard he had helped the Communists. (Note: xxxxx grandfather was shot and killed by Communists, and his father spent time in the Gulag)

17. (U) On July 14, the Communist Party presented the results of the June 2008 Center for Research of Russian Political Culture's complementary study on press freedom and propaganda as it pertained to the KPRF. Zukanov noted that the study found 45% of all KPRF references to be decidedly negative and only 14% decidedly favorable. The Russian channel TVT provided the most negative coverage while NTV projected the KPRF most favorably. Considering xxxxx, however, NTV only dedicated about 1% of its programming to the KPRF; therefore, its resonance with and impact on the public remained minimal despite its positive tone.

Opposition Hamstrung by Press Bias

18. (C) xxxxx said data supported the opposition claim that they received less government-controlled airtime, but didn't address the GOR counter-charge that the classic "liberal" opposition is doing little to generate news. xxxxx agreed, charging that "Russians feed from the same information trough." xxxxx attributed much of the blame for the stagnation of Russia's political opposition to a lack of leadership; however, he claimed the lack of unbiased press coverage reinforced the Russian population's unwavering support of the current leadership.

Press Research Lacks Public Influence

19. (C) xxxxx bemoaned the fact that no one showed up to the August 4 press conference at the House of Journalists organized to discuss the results of his research. (Note: PolOff was the only attendee present) While he admitted that both he and the organizers did a poor job of informing the press and publicizing the event, he felt that the public's general ennui about press freedom contributed to the lack of attendance. When asked about the projected influence of his research, xxxxx told PolOff that he hoped organizations such as the UN and OSCE would utilize his analysis to advocate for greater political transparency in Russia. Conversely, he claimed the largest influence of his organization sprung from its relations with foreign journalists at the Washington Post, Le Monde, and other western papers. While his center operated quietly, trying not to attract attention, it cooperated with foreign journalists by supplying opinions and information for more scathing articles. xxxxx told PolOff with obvious delight, "when western press articles have infuriated Kremlin officials in the past, xxxxx

Comment

110. (C) xxxxx data strikingly demonstrates that despite Medvedev's lavish courage in the media, he has yet to come out from Putin's shadow and create a political identity that resonates with Russian viewers.
Beyrle